

Ethics in Graduate Research

Faculty of Engineering

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What is 'ethics'?

- answers to the questions
 - what should I do?
 - what ought I to do?
 - how should I live?
- theoretical study: philosophy
- practical study: everyday ethics

What is moral philosophy?

- theoretical investigation of
 - content of morality
 - what are the moral rules?
 - e.g., ten commandments?
 - justification of morality
 - why are we required 'not to kill'?
what makes it wrong?
 - why should I be moral? why care?

Utilitarianism

- famous moral theory
 - set of ethical 'answers'
- classical version developed by
 - Jeremy Bentham
 - John Stuart Mill
- contemporary defenders include
 - Wayne Sumner

Utilitarianism

- the morally right act in a given situation is that act, among the alternatives, which leads to
 - ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’
 - highest net balance of pleasure and pain among everyone affected

Utilitarianism

- examination of the theory
 - what moral rules does it lead to?
 - e.g., ten commandments?
 - does it resolve quandries?
 - personal? professional?
 - are the answers morally helpful?
 - or do they cast doubt on theory?

George

- famous example
 - Bernard Williams
- George: recent chemistry PhD
 - ill health, trouble finding a job
 - wife and kids, wife earns the \$
 - strain on marriage, hard on kids

George

- older chemist who knows the situation offers to get George a well-paid job in a certain lab
 - but this lab does research in chemical and biological warfare
- George deeply opposes CBW
 - should he take the job?

George

- should he take the job?
 - utilitarianism: yes
 - Williams: no
 - taking the job requires George to abandon his integrity
 - not just wrong answer, but wrong approach to question

let's get real

- small flavour of moral philosophy
- for your purposes, matters little
 - rules to follow are not up for discussion
 - fixed by professional and University codes
 - quasi-legal status

let's get real

- e.g., Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering
 - Framework for Ethics in Research
- reasons to follow also not up for discussion, in practice
 - breach is a disciplinary matter

let's get real

- your responsibility
 - to learn the applicable rules
 - to comply voluntarily
 - to pre-empt ethical 'trouble'
 - like defensive driving
- but not yet ready to hand over

matters of interpretation

- unfortunately, the rules are not always 'ready to wear'
- require analysis and moral thinking on your part
 - not much help from utilitarianism or similar moral theories

matters of interpretation

- Faculty Framework, §2 (i)
 - ‘primary objective is creation of a research climate which fosters scientific integrity’
 - what is integrity?
 - for George? for science?

matters of interpretation

- Faculty Framework, §3
 - i. falsification of data
 - ii. use of another's work without permission, due acknowledgement
 - iii. issue of a misleading publication
 - e.g., denying legitimate authorship
 - iv. misuse of research funds

matters of interpretation

- **Faculty Framework, §3**
 - i. lying/cheating
 - ii. stealing
 - iii. lying/stealing
 - iv. stealing

§3 (iii): authorship

- when is authorship legitimate?
- when should someone be included as an author?
 - only when he or she made some contribution to paper
 - but what counts?

§3 (iii): authorship

- what counts as a contribution?
 - varies by discipline
 - e.g., philosophy vs. bioethics
 - presupposes multi-authorship
 - role of
 - supervisor
 - ‘sponsor’

§3 (iii): authorship

- to a large extent, legitimacy depends on expectations
 - coordinate in advance
 - avoid frustration, ambiguity
- authorship templates
 - e.g., medical journals
 - power of glasnost!